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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THIS little volume, issued as a gift book for lovers of Mr. Chesterton's writings, is made up from essays to be found in "The Defendant," "Varied Types," and "Tremendous Trifles."

A DEFENCE OF NONSENSE

THERE are two equal and eternal ways of looking at this twilight world of ours: we may see it as the twilight of evening or the twilight of morning; we may think of anything, down to a fallen acorn, as a descendant or as an ancestor. There are times when we are almost crushed, not so much with the load of the evil as with the load of the goodness of humanity, when we feel that we are nothing but the inheritors of a humiliating splendour. But there are other times when everything seems primitive, when the ancient stars are only sparks blown from a boy's bonfire, when the whole earth seems so young and experimental that even the white hair of the aged, in the fine biblical phrase, is like almond-trees that blossom, like the white hawthorn grown in May. That it is good

for a man to realize that he is "the heir of all the ages" is pretty commonly admitted; it is a less popular but equally important point that it is good for him sometimes to realize that he is not only an ancestor, but an ancestor of primal antiquity; it is good for him to wonder whether he is not a hero, and to experience ennobling doubts as to whether he is not a solar myth.

The matters which most thoroughly evoke this sense of the abiding childhood of the world are those which are really fresh, abrupt and inventive in any age; and if we were asked what was the best proof of this adventurous youth in the nineteenth century we should say, with all respect to its portentous sciences and philosophies, that it was to be found in the rhymes of Mr. Edward Lear and in the literature of nonsense. "The Dong with the Luminous Nose," at least, is original, as the first ship and the first plough were original.

A Defence of Nonsense

It is true in a certain sense that some of the greatest writers the world has seen—Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne—have written nonsense; but unless we are mistaken, it is in a widely different sense. The nonsense of these men was satiric—that is to say, symbolic; it was a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth. There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser's moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind. We incline to think that no age except our own could have understood that the Quangle-Wangle meant absolutely nothing, and the Lands of the Jumblies were absolutely nowhere. We fancy

that if the account of the knave's trial in "Alice in Wonderland" had been published in the seventeenth century it would have been bracketed with Bunyan's "Trial of Faithful" as a parody on the State prosecutions of the time. We fancy that if "The Dong with the Luminous Nose" had appeared in the same period every one would have called it a dull satire on Oliver Cromwell.

It is altogether advisedly that we quote chiefly from Mr. Lear's "Nonsense Rhymes." To our mind he is both chronologically and essentially the father of nonsense; we think him superior to Lewis Carroll. In one sense, indeed, Lewis Carroll has a great advantage. We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life in earth and in

dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back of nonsense—the idea of *escape*, of escape into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear-trees, and any odd man you meet may have three legs. Lewis Carroll, living one life in which he would have thundered morally against any one who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue, was, by his very divided nature, his one foot on both worlds, a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His Wonderland is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were Professors and Doctors of Divinity enjoying a mental holiday. This sense of escape is certainly

less emphatic in Edward Lear, because of the completeness of his citizenship in the world of unreason. We do not know his prosaic biography as we know Lewis Carroll's. We accept him as a purely fabulous figure, on his own description of himself:

> "His body is perfectly spherical,
> He weareth a runcible hat."

While Lewis Carroll's Wonderland is purely intellectual, Lear introduces quite another element—the element of the poetical and even emotional. Carroll works by the pure reason, but this is not so strong a contrast; for, after all, mankind in the main has always regarded reason as a bit of a joke. Lear introduces his unmeaning words and his amorphous creatures not with the pomp of reason, but with the romantic prelude of rich hues and haunting rhythms.

"Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live,"

is an entirely different type of poetry to that exhibited in "Jabberwocky." Carroll, with a sense of mathematical neatness, makes his whole poem a mosaic of new and mysterious words. But Edward Lear, with more subtle and placid effrontery, is always introducing scraps of his own elvish dialect into the middle of simple and rational statements, until we are almost stunned into admitting that we know what they mean. There is a genial ring of common sense about such lines as,

"For his aunt Jobiska said 'Every one knows
That a Pobble is better without his toes,'"

which is beyond the reach of Carroll. The poet seems so easy on the matter that we are almost driven to pretend that we see his meaning, that we know the peculiar difficulties of a Pobble, that we are as old travellers in the "Gromboolian Plain" as he is.

A Defence of Nonsense

Our claim that nonsense is a new literature (we might almost say a new sense) would be quite indefensible if nonsense were nothing more than a mere æsthetic fancy. Nothing sublimely artistic has ever arisen out of mere art, any more than anything essentially reasonable has ever arisen out of the pure reason. There must always be a rich moral soil for any great æsthetic growth. The principle of *art for art's sake* is a very good principle if it means that there is a vital distinction between the earth and the tree that has its roots in the earth; but it is a very bad principle if it means that the tree could grow just as well with its roots in the air. Every great literature has always been allegorical—allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The "Iliad" is only great because all life is a battle, the "Odyssey" because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle. There is

one attitude in which we think that all existence is summed up in the word "ghosts"; another, and somewhat better one, in which we think it is summed up in the words "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Even the vulgarest melodrama or detective story can be good if it expresses something of the delight in sinister possibilities—the healthy lust for darkness and terror which may come on us any night in walking down a dark lane. If, therefore, nonsense is really to be the literature of the future, it must have its own version of the Cosmos to offer; the world must not only be the tragic, romantic, and religious, it must be nonsensical also. And here we fancy that nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the "wonders" of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely

wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from that other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two.

This is the side of things which tends most truly to spiritual wonder. It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has

been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. "Hast Thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?" This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense. Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that "faith is nonsense," does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.

A DEFENCE OF USEFUL INFORMATION

IT is natural and proper enough that the masses of explosive ammunition stored up in detective stories and the replete and solid sweet-stuff shops which are called sentimental novelettes should be popular with the ordinary customer. It is not difficult to realize that all of us, ignorant or cultivated, are primarily interested in murder and love-making. The really extraordinary thing is that the most appalling fictions are not actually so popular as that literature which deals with the most undisputed and depressing facts. Men are not apparently so interested in murder and love-making as they are in the number of different forms of latchkey which exist in London or the time that it would take a

grasshopper to jump from Cairo to the Cape. The enormous mass of fatuous and useless truth which fills the most widely-circulated papers, such as *Tit-Bits*, *Science Siftings*, and many of the illustrated magazines, is certainly one of the most extraordinary kinds of emotional and mental pabulum on which man ever fed. It is almost incredible that these preposterous statistics should actually be more popular than the most blood-curdling mysteries and the most luxurious debauches of sentiment. To imagine it is like imagining the humorous passages in Bradshaw's Railway Guide read aloud on winter evenings. It is like conceiving a man unable to put down an advertisement of Mother Seigel's Syrup because he wished to know what eventually happened to the young man who was extremely ill at Edinburgh. In the case of cheap detective stories and cheap novelettes, we can most of us feel, whatever our

degree of education, that it might be possible to read them if we gave full indulgence to a lower and more facile part of our natures; at the worst we feel that we might enjoy them as we might enjoy bull-baiting or getting drunk. But the literature of information is absolutely mysterious to us. We can no more think of amusing ourselves with it than of reading whole pages of a Surbiton local directory. To read such things would not be a piece of vulgar indulgence; it would be a highly arduous and meritorious enterprise. It is this fact which constitutes a profound and almost unfathomable interest in this particular branch of popular literature.

Primarily, at least, there is one rather peculiar thing which must in justice be said about it. The readers of this strange science must be allowed to be, upon the whole, as disinterested as a prophet seeing visions or a child reading fairy-tales.

Here, again, we find, as we so often do, that whatever view of this matter of popular literature we can trust, we can trust least of all the comment and censure current among the vulgar educated. The ordinary version of the ground of this popularity for information, which would be given by a person of greater cultivation, would be that common men are chiefly interested in those sordid facts that surround them on every side. A very small degree of examination will show us that whatever ground there is for the popularity of these insane encyclopædias, it cannot be the ground of utility. The version of life given by a penny novelette may be very moonstruck and unreliable, but it is at least more likely to contain facts relevant to daily life than computations on the subject of the number of cows' tails that would reach the North Pole. There are many more people who are in love than there are people who have any intention of

counting or collecting cows' tails. It is evident to me that the grounds of this widespread madness of information for information's sake must be sought in other and deeper parts of human nature than those daily-needs which lie so near the surface that even social philosophers have discovered them somewhere in that profound and eternal instinct for enthusiasm and minding other people's business which made great popular movements like the Crusades or the Gordon Riots.

I once had the pleasure of knowing a man who actually talked in private life after the manner of these papers. His conversation consisted of fragramentary statements about height and weight and depth and time and population, and his conversation was a nightmare of dullness. During the shortest pause he would ask whether his interlocutors were aware how many tons of rust were scraped every year off the Menai

Bridge, and how many rival shops Mr. Whiteley had bought up since he opened his business. The attitude of his acquaintances towards this inexhaustible entertainer varied according to his presence or absence between indifference and terror. It was frightful to think of a man's brain being stocked with such inexpressibly profitless treasures. It was like visiting some imposing British Museum and finding its galleries and glass cases filled with specimens of London mud, of common mortar, of broken walking-sticks and cheap tobacco. Years afterwards I discovered that this intolerable prosaic bore had been, in fact, a poet. I learnt that every item of this multitudinous information was totally and unblushingly untrue, that for all I knew he had made it up as he went along; that no tons of rust are scraped off the Menai Bridge, and that the rival tradesmen and Mr. Whiteley were creatures of the poet's

brain. Instantly I conceived consuming respect for the man who was so circumstantial, so monotonous, so entirely purposeless a liar. With him it must have been a case of art for art's sake. The joke sustained so gravely through a respected lifetime was of that order of joke which is shared with omniscience. But what struck me more cogently upon reflection was the fact that these immeasurable trivialities, which had struck me as utterly vulgar and arid when I thought they were true, immediately became picturesque and almost brilliant when I thought they were inventions of the human fancy. And here, as it seems to me, I laid my finger upon a fundamental quality of the cultivated class which prevents it, and will, perhaps, always prevent it from seeing with the eyes of popular imagination. The merely educated can scarcely ever be brought to believe that this world is itself an interesting place.

When they look at a work of art, good or bad, they expect to be interested, but when they look at a newspaper advertisement or a group in the street, they do not, properly and literally speaking, expect to be interested. But to common and simple people this world is a work of art, though it is, like many great works of art, anonymous. They look to life for interest with the same kind of cheerful and uneradicable assurance with which we look for interest at a comedy for which we have paid money at the door. To the eyes of the ultimate school of contemporary fastidiousness, the universe is indeed an ill-drawn and overcoloured picture, the scrawlings in circles of a baby upon the slate of night; its starry skies are a vulgar pattern which they would not have for a wallpaper, its flowers and fruits have a cockney brilliancy, like the holiday hat of a flower-girl. Hence, degraded by art to its own level, they have

lost altogether that primitive and typical taste of man—the taste for news. By this essential taste for news, I mean the pleasure in hearing the mere fact that a man has died at the age of 110 in South Wales, or that the horses ran away at a funeral in San Francisco. Large masses of the early faiths and politics of the world, numbers of the miracles and heroic anecdotes, are based primarily upon this love of something that has just happened, this divine institution of gossip. When Christianity was named the good news, it spread rapidly, not only because it was good, but also because it was news. So it is that if any of us have ever spoken to a navvy in a train about the daily paper, we have generally found the navvy interested, not in those struggles of Parliaments and trades unions which sometimes are, and are always supposed to be, for his benefit; but in the fact that an unusually large whale has been washed up

on the coast of Orkney, or that some leading millionaire like Mr. Harmsworth is reported to break a hundred pipes a year. The educated classes, cloyed and demoralized with the mere indulgence of art and mood, can no longer understand the idle and splendid disinterestedness of the reader of *Pearson's Weekly*. He still keeps something of that feeling which should be the birthright of men—the feeling that this planet is like a new house into which we have just moved our baggage. Any detail of it has a value, and, with a truly sportsmanlike instinct, the average man takes most pleasure in the details which are most complicated, irrelevant, and at once difficult and useless to discover. Those parts of the newspaper which announce the giant gooseberry and the raining frogs are really the modern representatives of the popular tendency which produced the hydra and the werewolf and the dog-headed men. Folk in

the Middle Ages were not interested in a dragon or a glimpse of the devil because they thought that it was a beautiful prose idyll, but because they thought that it had really just been seen. It was not like so much artistic literature, a refuge indicating the dullness of the world: it was an incident pointedly illustrating the fecund poetry of the world.

That much can be said, and is said, against the literature of information, I do not for a moment deny. It is shapeless, it is trivial, it may give an unreal air of knowledge, it unquestionably lies along with the rest of popular literature under the general indictment that it may spoil the chance of better work, certainly by wasting time, possibly by ruining taste. But these obvious objections are the objections which we hear so persistently from every one that one cannot help wondering where the papers in question procure their myriads of readers.

The natural necessity and natural good underlying such crude institutions is far less often a subject of speculation; yet the healthy hungers which lie at the back of the habits of modern democracy are surely worthy of the same sympathetic study that we give to the dogmas of the fanatics long dethroned and the intrigues of commonwealths long obliterated from the earth. And this is the base and consideration which I have to offer: that perhaps the taste for shreds and patches of journalistic science and history is not, as is continually asserted, the vulgar and senile curiosity of a people that has grown old, but simply the babyish and indiscriminate curiosity of a people still young and entering history for the first time. In other words, I suggest that they only tell each other in magazines the same kind of stories of commonplace portents and conventional eccentricities which, in any case, they would tell each other in

taverns. Science itself is only the exaggeration and specialization of this thirst for useless fact, which is the mark of the youth of man. But science has become strangely separated from the mere news and scandal of flowers and birds; men have ceased to see that a pterodactyl was as fresh and natural as a flower, that a flower is as monstrous as a pterodactyl. The rebuilding of this bridge between science and human nature is one of the greatest needs of mankind. We have all to show that before we go on to any visions or creations we can be contented with a planet of miracles.

A DEFENCE OF RASH VOWS

IF a prosperous modern man, with a high hat and a frock-coat, were to solemnly pledge himself before all his clerks and friends to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, to hop up to the City on one leg every Thursday, to repeat the whole of Mill's "Liberty" seventy-six times, to collect 300 dandelions in fields belonging to any one of the name of Brown, to remain for thirty-one hours holding his left ear in his right hand, to sing the names of all his aunts in order of age on the top of an omnibus, or make any such unusual undertaking, we should immediately conclude that the man was mad, or, as it is sometimes expressed, was "an artist in life." Yet these vows are not more extraordinary than the vows which in the Middle

Ages and in similar periods were made, not by fanatics merely, but by the greatest figures in civic and national civilization—by kings, judges, poets, and priests. One man swore to chain two mountains together, and the great chain hung there, it was said, for ages as a monument of that mystical folly. Another swore that he would find his way to Jerusalem with a patch over his eyes, and died looking for it. It is not easy to see that these two exploits, judged from a strictly rational standpoint, are any saner than the acts above suggested. A mountain is commonly a stationary and reliable object which it is not necessary to chain up at night like a dog. And it is not easy at first sight to see that a man pays a very high compliment to the Holy City by setting out for it under conditions which render it to the last degree improbable that he will ever get there.

But about this there is one striking thing

to be noticed. If men behaved in that way in our time, we should, as we have said, regard them as symbols of the "decadence." But the men who did these things were not decadent; they belonged generally to the most robust classes of what is generally regarded as a robust age. Again, it will be urged that if men essentially sane performed such insanities, it was under the capricious direction of a superstitious religious system. This, again, will not hold water; for in the purely terrestrial and even sensual departments of life, such as love and lust, the mediæval princes show the same mad promises and performances, the same misshapen imagination and the same monstrous self-sacrifice. Here we have a contradiction, to explain which it is necessary to think of the whole nature of vows from the beginning. And if we consider seriously and correctly the nature of vows, we shall, unless I am much mistaken,

come to the conclusion that it is perfectly sane, and even sensible, to swear to chain mountains together, and that, if insanity is involved at all, it is a little insane not to do so.

The man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. The danger of it is that himself should not keep the appointment. And in modern times this terror of one's self, of the weakness and mutability of one's self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind. A modern man refrains from swearing to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, not because it is silly to do so (he does many sillier things), but because he has a profound conviction that before he had got to the three hundred and seventy-ninth leaf on the first tree he would be excessively tired of the subject and want to go home to tea. In other words, we fear that by that time he will be,

in the common but hideously significant phrase, *another man.* Now, it is this horrible fairy-tale of a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of the decadence. That John Paterson should, with apparent calm, look forward to being a certain General Barker on Monday, Dr. Macgregor on Tuesday, Sir Walter Carstairs on Wednesday, and Sam Slugg on Thursday, may seem a nightmare; but to that nightmare we give the name of modern culture. One great decadent, who is now dead, published a poem some time ago, in which he powerfully summed up the whole spirit of the movement by declaring that he could stand in the prison yard and entirely comprehend the feelings of a man about to be hanged:

> "For he that lives more lives than one
> More deaths than one must die."

And the end of all this is that maddening horror of unreality which descends upon

the decadents, and compared with which physical pain itself would have the freshness of a youthful thing. The one hell which imagination must conceive as most hellish is to be eternally acting a play without even the narrowest and dirtiest greenroom in which to be human. And this is the condition of the decadent, of the æsthete, of the free-lover. To be everlastingly passing through dangers which we know cannot scathe us, to be taking oaths which we know cannot bind us, to be defying enemies who we know cannot conquer us—this is the grinning tyranny of decadence which is called freedom.

Let us turn, on the other hand, to the maker of vows. The man who made a vow, however wild, gave a healthy and natural expression to the greatness of a great moment. He vowed, for example, to chain two mountains together, perhaps a symbol of some great relief, or love, or

aspiration. Short as the moment of his resolve might be, it was, like all great moments, a moment of immortality, and the desire to say of it *exegi monumentum ære perennius* was the only sentiment that would satisfy his mind. The modern æsthetic man would, of course, easily see the emotional opportunity; he would vow to chain two mountains together. But, then, he would quite as cheerfully vow to chain the earth to the moon. And the withering consciousness that he did not mean what he said, that he was, in truth, saying nothing of any great import, would take from him exactly that sense of daring actuality which is the excitement of a vow. For what could be more maddening than an existence in which our mother or aunt received the information that we were going to assassinate the King or build a temple on Ben Nevis with the genial composure of custom?

A Defence of Rash Vows

The revolt against vows has been carried in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—"free-love"—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word. Modern sages offer to the lover, with an ill-flavoured grin, the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; but they do not respect him as the old Church respected him; they do not write his oath upon the heavens, as the record of

his highest moment. They give him every liberty except the liberty to sell his liberty, which is the only one that he wants.

In Mr. Bernard Shaw's brilliant play "The Philanderer," we have a vivid picture of this state of things. Charteris is a man perpetually endeavouring to be a free-lover, which is like endeavouring to be a married bachelor or a white negro. He is wandering in a hungry search for a certain exhilaration which he can only have when he has the courage to cease from wandering. Men knew better than this in old times—in the time, for example, of Shakespeare's heroes. When Shakespeare's men are really celibate they praise the undoubted advantages of celibacy, liberty, irresponsibility, a chance of continual change. But they were not such fools as to continue to talk of liberty when they were in such a condition that they could be made happy or miserable by the moving of some one

else's eyebrow. Suckling classes love with debt in his praise of freedom.

> "And he that's fairly out of both
> Of all the world is blest.
> He lives as in the golden age,
> When all things made were common;
> He takes his pipe, he takes his glass,
> He fears no man or woman."

This is a perfectly possible, rational and manly position. But what have lovers to do with ridiculous affectations of fearing no man or woman? They know that in the turning of a hand the whole cosmic engine to the remotest star may become an instrument of music or an instrument of torture. They hear a song older than Suckling's, that has survived a hundred philosophies. "Who is this that looketh out of the window, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners?"

As we have said, it is exactly this back-

door, this sense of having a retreat behind us, that is, to our minds, the sterilizing spirit in modern pleasure. Everywhere there is the persistent and insane attempt to obtain pleasure without paying for it. Thus, in politics the modern Jingoes practically say, "Let us have the pleasures of conquerors without the pains of soldiers: let us sit on sofas and be a hardy race." Thus, in religion and morals, the decadent mystics say: "Let us have the fragrance of sacred purity without the sorrows of self-restraint; let us sing hymns alternately to the Virgin and Priapus." Thus in love the free-lovers say: "Let us have the splendour of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times."

Emphatically it will not work. There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the æsthete;

but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing. It must have satisfied even the giant hunger of the soul of a lover or a poet to know that in consequence of some one instant of decision that strange chain would hang for centuries in the Alps among the silences of stars and snows. All around us is the city of small sins, abounding in backways and retreats, but surely, sooner or later, the towering flame will rise from the harbour announcing that the reign of the cowards is over and a man is burning his ships.

A DEFENCE OF FARCE

I HAVE never been able to understand why certain forms of art should be marked off as something debased and trivial. A comedy is spoken of as "degenerating into farce"; it would be fair criticism to speak of it "changing into farce"; but as for degenerating into farce, we might equally reasonably speak of it as degenerating into tragedy. Again, a story is spoken of as "melodramatic," and the phrase, queerly enough, is not meant as a compliment. To speak of something as "pantomimic" or "sensational" is innocently supposed to be biting, heaven knows why, for all works of art are sensations, and a good pantomime (now extinct) is one of the pleasantest sensations of all. "This stuff is fit for a detective story," is

often said, as who should say, "This stuff is fit for an epic."

Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of this mode of classification, there can be no doubt about one most practical and disastrous effect of it. These lighter or wilder forms of art, having no standard set up for them, no gust of generous artistic pride to lift them up, do actually tend to become as bad as they are supposed to be. Neglected children of the great mother, they grow up in darkness, dirty and unlettered, and when they are right they are right almost by accident, because of the blood in their veins. The common detective story of mystery and murder seems to the intelligent reader to be little except a strange glimpse of a planet peopled by congenital idiots, who cannot find the end of their own noses or the character of their own wives. The common pantomime seems like some horrible satiric picture of a world

without cause or effect, a mass of "jarring atoms," a prolonged mental torture of irrelevancy. The ordinary farce seems a world of almost piteous vulgarity, where a half-witted and stunted creature is afraid when his wife comes home, and amused when she sits down on the door-step. All this is, in a sense, true, but it is the fault of nothing in heaven or earth except the attitude and the phrases quoted at the beginning of this article. We have no doubt in the world that, if the other forms of art had been equally despised, they would have been equally despicable. If people had spoken of "sonnets" with the same accent with which they speak of "music-hall songs," a sonnet would have been a thing so fearful and wonderful that we almost regret we cannot have a specimen; a rowdy sonnet is a thing to dream about. If people had said that epics were only fit for children and nurse-maids, "Paradise Lost" might have been

an average pantomime: it might have been called "Harlequin Satan, or How Adam 'Ad 'Em." For who would trouble to bring to perfection a work in which even perfection is grotesque? Why should Shakespeare write "Othello" if even his triumph consisted in the eulogy, "Mr. Shakespeare is fit for something better than writing tragedies"?

The case of farce, and its wilder embodiment in harlequinade, is especially important. That these high and legitimate forms of art, glorified by Aristophanes and Molière, have sunk into such contempt may be due to many causes: I myself have little doubt that it is due to the astonishing and ludicrous lack of belief in hope and hilarity which marks modern æsthetics, to such an extent that it has spread even to the revolutionists (once the hopeful section of men), so that even those who ask us to fling the stars into the sea are not quite sure that they will be any better there than

they were before. Every form of literary art must be a symbol of some phase of the human spirit; but whereas the phase is, in human life, sufficiently convincing in itself, in art it must have a certain pungency and neatness of form, to compensate for its lack of reality. Thus any set of young people round a tea-table may have all the comedy emotions of "Much Ado about Nothing" or "Northanger Abbey," but if their actual conversation were reported, it would possibly not be a worthy addition to literature. An old man sitting by his fire may have all the desolate grandeur of Lear or Père Goriot, but if he comes into literature he must do something besides sit by the fire. The artistic justification, then, of farce and pantomime must consist in the emotions of life which correspond to them. And these emotions are to an incredible extent crushed out by the modern insistence on the painful side of life only. Pain, it is

said, is the dominant element of life; but this is true only in a very special sense. If pain were for one single instant literally the dominant element in life, every man would be found hanging dead from his own bed-post by the morning. Pain, as the black and catastrophic thing, attracts the youthful artist, just as the schoolboy draws devils and skeletons and men hanging. But joy is a far more elusive and elvish matter, since it is our reason for existing, and a very feminine reason; it mingles with every breath we draw and every cup of tea we drink. The literature of joy s infinitely more difficult, more rare and more triumphant than the black and white literature of pain. And of all the varied forms of the literature of joy, the form most truly worthy of moral reverence and artistic ambition is the form called "farce"—or its wilder shape in pantomime.

To the quietest human being, seated in

the quietest house, there will sometimes come a sudden and unmeaning hunger for the possibilities or impossibilities of things; he will abruptly wonder whether the tea-pot may not suddenly begin to pour out honey or sea-water, the clock to point to all hours of the day at once, the candle to burn green or crimson, the door to open upon a lake or a potato-field instead of a London street. Upon any one who feels this nameless anarchism there rests for the time being the abiding spirit of pantomime. Of the clown who cuts the policeman in two it may be said (with no darker meaning) that he realizes one of our visions. And it may be noted here that this internal quality in pantomime is perfectly symbolized and preserved by that commonplace or cockney landscape and architecture which characterizes pantomime and farce. If the whole affair happened in some alien atmosphere, if a pear-tree began to grow apples

or a river to run with wine in some strange fairy-land, the effect would be quite different. The streets and shops and door-knockers of the harlequinade, which to the vulgar æsthete make it seem commonplace, are in truth the very essence of the æsthetic departure. It must be an actual modern door which opens and shuts, constantly disclosing different interiors; it must be a real baker whose loaves fly up into air without his touching them, or else the whole internal excitement of this elvish invasion of civilization, this abrupt entrance of Puck into Pimlico, is lost. Some day, perhaps, when the present narrow phase of æsthetics has ceased to monopolize the name, the glory of a farcical art may become fashionable. Long after men have ceased to drape their houses in green and gray and to adorn them with Japanese vases, an æsthete may build a house on pantomime principles, in which all the doors shall have their bells

and knockers on the inside, all the staircases be constructed to vanish on the pressing of a button, and all the dinners (humorous dinners in themselves) come up cooked through a trap-door. We are very sure, at least, that it is as reasonable to regulate one's life and lodgings by this kind of art as by any other.

The whole of this view of farce and pantomime may seem insane to us; but we fear that it is we who are insane. Nothing in this strange age of transition is so depressing as its merriment. All the most brilliant men of the day when they set about the writing of comic literature do it under one destructive fallacy and disadvantage: the notion that comic literature is in some sort of way superficial. They give us little knickknacks of the brittleness of which they positively boast, although two thousand years have beaten as vainly upon the follies of the "Frogs" as on

the wisdom of the "Republic." It is all a mean shame of joy. When we come out from a performance of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" we feel as near to the stars as when we come out from "King Lear." For the joy of these works is older than sorrow, their extravagance is saner than wisdom, their love is stronger than death.

The old masters of a healthy madness, Aristophanes or Rabelais or Shakespeare, doubtless had many brushes with the precisians or ascetics of their day, but we cannot but feel that for honest severity and consistent self-maceration they would always have had respect. But what abysses of scorn, inconceivable to any modern, would they have reserved for an æsthetic type and movement which violated morality and did not even find pleasure, which outraged sanity and could not attain to exuberance, which contented itself with the fool's cap without the bells!

A DEFENCE OF BABY-WORSHIP

THE two facts which attract almost every normal person to children are, first, that they are very serious, and, secondly, that they are in consequence very happy. They are jolly with the completeness which is possible only in the absence of humour. The most unfathomable schools and sages have never attained to the gravity which dwells in the eyes of a baby of three months old. It is the gravity of astonishment at the universe, and astonishment at the universe is not mysticism, but a transcendent common sense. The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads, three times too big

for the body, which mark these human mushrooms, we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea.

There is always in the healthy mind an obscure prompting that religion teaches us rather to dig than to climb; that if we could once understand the common clay of earth we should understand everything. Similarly, we have the sentiment that if we could destroy custom at a blow and see the stars as a child sees them, we should need no other apocalypse. This is the great truth which has always lain at the back of baby-worship, and which will support it to the end. Maturity, with its endless energies and aspirations, may easily be convinced that it will find new things to appreciate;

but it will never be convinced, at bottom, that it has properly appreciated what it has got. We may scale the heavens and find new stars innumerable, but there is still the new star we have not found—that on which we were born.

But the influence of children goes further than its first trifling effort of remaking heaven and earth. It forces us actually to remodel our conduct in accordance with this revolutionary theory of the marvellousness of all things. We do (even when we are perfectly simple or ignorant)—we do actually treat talking in children as marvellous, walking in children as marvellous, common intelligence in children as marvellous. The cynical philosopher fancies he has a victory in this matter—that he can laugh when he shows that the words or antics of the child, so much admired by its worshippers, are common enough. The fact is that this is precisely where baby-worship is

so profoundly right. Any words and any antics in a lump of clay are wonderful, the child's words and antics are wonderful, and it is only fair to say that the philosopher's words and antics are equally wonderful.

The truth is that it is our attitude towards children that is right, and our attitude towards grown-up people that is wrong. Our attitude towards our equals in age consists in a servile solemnity, overlying a considerable degree of indifference or disdain. Our attitude towards children consists in a condescending indulgence, overlying an unfathomable respect. We bow to grown people, take off our hats to them, refrain from contradicting them flatly, but we do not appreciate them properly. We make puppets of children, lecture them, pull their hair, and reverence, love, and fear them. When we reverence anything in the mature, it is their virtues or their wisdom, and this

is an easy matter. But we reverence the faults and follies of children.

We should probably come considerably nearer to the true conception of things if we treated all grown-up persons, of all titles and types, with precisely that dark affection and dazed respect with which we treat the infantile limitations. A child has a difficulty in achieving the miracle of speech, consequently we find his blunders almost as marvellous as his accuracy. If we only adopted the same attitude towards Premiers and Chancellors of the Exchequer, if we genially encouraged their stammering and delightful attempts at human speech, we should be in a far more wise and tolerant temper. A child has a knack of making experiments in life, generally healthy in motive, but often intolerable in a domestic commonwealth. If we only treated all commercial buccaneers and bumptious tyrants on the same terms, if we gently

chided their brutalities as rather quaint mistakes in the conduct of life, if we simply told them that they would "understand when they were older," we should probably be adopting the best and most crushing attitude towards the weaknesses of humanity. In our relations to children we prove that the paradox is entirely true, that it is possible to combine an amnesty that verges on contempt with a worship that verges upon terror. We forgive children with the same kind of blasphemous gentleness with which Omar Khayyam forgave the Omnipotent.

The essential rectitude of our view of children lies in the fact that we feel them and their ways to be supernatural while, for some mysterious reason, we do not feel ourselves or our own ways to be supernatural. The very smallness of children makes it possible to regard them as marvels; we seem to be dealing with a new race, only to

be seen through a microscope. I doubt if any one of any tenderness or imagination can see the hand of a child and not be a little frightened of it. It is awful to think of the essential human energy moving so tiny a thing; it is like imagining that human nature could live in the wing of a butterfly or the leaf of a tree. When we look upon lives so human and yet so small, we feel as if we ourselves were enlarged to an embarrassing bigness of stature. We feel the same kind of obligation to these creatures that a deity might feel if he had created something that he could not understand.

But the humorous look of children is perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together. Their top-heavy dignity is more touching than any humility; their solemnity gives us more hope for all things than a thousand carnivals of optimism; their large and lustrous eyes seem to hold all the stars in their astonish-

ment; their fascinating absence of nose seems to give to us the most perfect hint of the humour that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven.

A DEFENCE OF SLANG

THE aristocrats of the nineteenth century have destroyed entirely their one solitary utility. It is their business to be flaunting and arrogant; but they flaunt unobtrusively, and their attempts at arrogance are depressing. Their chief duty hitherto has been the development of variety, vivacity, and fullness of life; oligarchy was the world's first experiment in liberty. But now they have adopted the opposite ideal of "good form," which may be defined as Puritanism without religion. Good form has sent them all into black like the stroke of a funeral bell. They engage, like Mr. Gilbert's curates, in a war of mildness, a positive competition of obscurity. In old times the lords of the earth sought above all things to be dis-

tinguished from each other; with that object they erected outrageous images on their helmets and painted preposterous colours on their shields. They wished to make it entirely clear that a Norfolk was as different, say, from an Argyll as a white lion from a black pig. But to-day their ideal is precisely the opposite one, and if a Norfolk and an Argyll were dressed so much alike that they were mistaken for each other they would both go home dancing with joy.

The consequences of this are inevitable. The aristocracy must lose their function of standing to the world for the idea of variety, experiment, and colour, and we must find these things in some other class. To ask whether we shall find them in the middle class would be to jest upon sacred matters. The only conclusion, therefore, is that it is to certain sections of the lower class, chiefly, for example, to omnibus-con-

ductors, with their rich and rococo mode of thought, that we must look for guidance towards liberty and light.

The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang. Every day a nameless poet weaves some fairy tracery of popular language. It may be said that the fashionable world talks slang as much as the democratic ; this is true, and it strongly supports the view under consideration. Nothing is more startling than the contrast between the heavy, formal, lifeless slang of the man-about-town and the light, living, and flexible slang of the coster. The talk of the upper strata of the educated classes is about the most shapeless, aimless, and hopeless literary product that the world has ever seen. Clearly in this, again, the upper classes have degenerated. We have ample evidence that the old leaders of feudal war could speak on occasion with a certain natural symbolism and eloquence

that they had not gained from books. When Cyrano de Bergerac, in Rostand's play, throws doubts on the reality of Christian's dullness and lack of culture, the latter replies:

> " Bah ! on trouve des mots quand on monte à
> l'assaut ;
> Oui, j'ai un certain esprit facile et militaire ; "

and these two lines sum up a truth about the old oligarchs. They could not write three legible letters, but they could sometimes speak literature. Douglas, when he hurled the heart of Bruce in front of him in his last battle, cried out, " Pass first, great heart, as thou wert ever wont." A Spanish nobleman, when commanded by the King to receive a high-placed and notorious traitor, said : " I will receive him in all obedience, and burn down my house afterwards." This is literature without

culture; it is the speech of men convinced that they have to assert proudly the poetry of life.

Any one, however, who should seek for such pearls in the conversation of a young man of modern Belgravia would have much sorrow in his life. It is not only impossible for aristocrats to assert proudly the poetry of life; it is more impossible for them than for any one else. It is positively considered vulgar for a nobleman to boast of his ancient name, which is, when one comes to think of it, the only rational object of his existence. If a man in the street proclaimed, with rude feudal rhetoric, that he was the Earl of Doncaster, he would be arrested as a lunatic; but if it were discovered that he really was the Earl of Doncaster, he would simply be cut as a cad. No poetical prose must be expected from Earls as a class. The fashionable slang is hardly even a language; it is like the form-

less cries of animals, dimly indicating certain broad, well-understood states of mind. "Bored," "cut up," "jolly," "rotten," and so on, are like the words of some tribe of savages whose vocabulary has only twenty of them. If a man of fashion wished to protest against some solecism in another man of fashion, his utterance would be a mere string of set phrases, as lifeless as a string of dead fish. But an omnibus-conductor (being filled with the Muse) would burst out into a solid literary effort: "You're a gen'leman, aren't yer . . . yer boots is a lot brighter than yer 'ed . . . there's precious little of yer, and that's clothes . . . that's right, put yer cigar in yer mouth 'cos I can't see yer be'ind it . . . take it out again, do yer! you're young for smokin', but I've sent for yer mother. . . . Goin'? oh, don't run away: I won't 'arm yer. I've got a good 'art, I 'ave. . . . 'Down with croolty to animals,' I say,"

and so on. It is evident that this mode of speech is not only literary, but literary in a very ornate and almost artificial sense. Keats never put into a sonnet so many remote metaphors as a coster puts into a curse ; his speech is one long allegory, like Spenser's " Faerie Queen."

I do not imagine that it is necessary to demonstrate that this poetic allusiveness is the characteristic of true slang. Such an expression as " Keep your hair on " is positively Meredithian in its perverse and mysterious manner of expressing an idea. The Americans have a well-known expression about " swelled-head " as a description of self-approval, and the other day I heard a remarkable fantasia upon this air. An American said that after the Chinese War the Japanese wanted " to put on their hats with a shoe-horn." This is a monument of the true nature of slang, which consists in getting further and further away from the

original conception, in treating it more and more as an assumption. It is rather like the literary doctrine of the Symbolists.

The real reason of this great development of eloquence among the lower orders again brings us back to the case of the aristocracy in earlier times. The lower classes live in a state of war, a war of words. Their readiness is the product of the same fiery individualism as the readiness of the old fighting oligarchs. Any cabman has to be ready with his tongue, as any gentleman of the last century had to be ready with his sword. It is unfortunate that the poetry which is developed by this process should be purely a grotesque poetry. But as the higher orders of society have entirely abdicated their right to speak with a heroic eloquence, it is no wonder that the language should develop by itself in the direction of a rowdy eloquence. The essential point is that some-

body must be at work adding new symbols and new circumlocutions to a language.

All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry. If we paused for a moment to examine the cheapest cant phrases that pass our lips every day, we should find that they were as rich and suggestive as so many sonnets. To take a single instance: we speak of a man in English social relations "breaking the ice." If this were expanded into a sonnet, we should have before us a dark and sublime picture of an ocean of everlasting ice, the sombre and baffling mirror of the Northern nature, over which men walked and danced and skated easily, but under which the living waters roared and toiled fathoms below. The world of slang is a kind of topsy-turveydom of poetry, full of blue moons and white elephants, of men losing their heads, and men whose tongues run away with them—a whole chaos of fairy-tales.

A DEFENCE OF HUMILITY

THE act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has to-day all the exhilaration of a vice. Moral truisms have been so much disputed that they have begun to sparkle like so many brilliant paradoxes. And especially (in this age of egoistic idealism) there is about one who defends humility something inexpressibly rakish.

It is no part of my intention to defend humility on practical grounds. Practical grounds are uninteresting, and, moreover, on practical grounds the case for humility is overwhelming. We all know that the "divine glory of the ego" is socially a great nuisance; we all do actually value our friends for modesty, freshness, and simplicity of heart. Whatever may be the

reason, we all do warmly respect humility —in other people.

But the matter must go deeper than this. If the grounds of humility are found only in social convenience, they may be quite trivial and temporary. The egoists may be the martyrs of a nobler dispensation, agonizing for a more arduous ideal. To judge from the comparative lack of ease in their social manner, this seems a reasonable suggestion.

There is one thing that must be seen at the outset of the study of humility from an intrinsic and eternal point of view. The new philosophy of self-esteem and self-assertion declares that humility is a vice. If it be so, it is quite clear that it is one of those vices which are an integral part of original sin. It follows with the precision of clockwork every one of the great joys of life. No one, for example, was ever in love without indulging in a

positive debauch of humility. All full-blooded and natural people, such as schoolboys, enjoy humility the moment they attain hero-worship. Humility, again, is said both by its upholders and opponents to be the peculiar growth of Christianity. The real and obvious reason of this is often missed. The pagans insisted upon self-assertion because it was the essence of their creed that the gods, though strong and just, were mystic, capricious, and even indifferent. But the essence of Christianity was in a literal sense the New Testament —a covenant with God which opened to men a clear deliverance. They thought themselves secure; they claimed palaces of pearl and silver under the oath and seal of the Omnipotent; they believed themselves rich with an irrevocable benediction which set them above the stars; and immediately they discovered humility. It was only another example of the same

immutable paradox. It is always the secure who are humble.

This particular instance survives in the evangelical revivalists of the street. They are irritating enough, but no one who has really studied them can deny that the irritation is occasioned by these two things, an irritating hilarity and an irritating humility. This combination of joy and self-prostration is a great deal too universal to be ignored. If humility has been discredited as a virtue at the present day, it is not wholly irrelevant to remark that this discredit has arisen at the same time as a great collapse of joy in current literature and philosophy. Men have revived the splendour of Greek self-assertion at the same time that they have revived the bitterness of Greek pessimism. A literature has arisen which commands us all to arrogate to ourselves the liberty of self-sufficing deities at the same time that it exhibits us to ourselves as dingy maniacs

who ought to be chained up like dogs. It is certainly a curious state of things altogether. When we are genuinely happy, we think we are unworthy of happiness. But when we are demanding a divine emancipation we seem to be perfectly certain that we are unworthy of anything.

The only explanation of the matter must be found in the conviction that humility has infinitely deeper roots than any modern men suppose; that it is a metaphysical and, one might almost say, a mathematical virtue. Probably this can best be tested by a study of those who frankly disregard humility and assert the supreme duty of perfecting and expressing one's self. These people tend, by a perfectly natural process, to bring their own great human gifts of culture, intellect, or moral power to a great perfection, successively shutting out everything that they feel to be lower than themselves. Now shutting out things is all

very well, but it has one simple corollary—that from everything that we shut out we are ourselves shut out. When we shut our door on the wind, it would be equally true to say that the wind shuts its door on us. Whatever virtues a triumphant egoism really leads to, no one can reasonably pretend that it leads to knowledge. Turning a beggar from the door may be right enough, but pretending to know all the stories the beggar might have narrated is pure nonsense; and this is practically the claim of the egoism which thinks that self-assertion can obtain knowledge. A beetle may or may not be inferior to a man—the matter awaits demonstration; but if he were inferior by ten thousand fathoms, the fact remains that there is probably a beetle view of things of which a man is entirely ignorant. If he wishes to conceive that point of view, he will scarcely reach it by persistently revelling in the fact that he is not

a beetle. The most brilliant exponent of the egoistic school, Nietszche, with deadly and honourable logic, admitted that the philosophy of self-satisfaction led to looking down upon the weak, the cowardly, and the ignorant. Looking down on things may be a delightful experience, only there is nothing, from a mountain to a cabbage, that is really *seen* when it is seen from a balloon. The philosopher of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarified heaven; only he sees everything foreshortened or deformed.

Now if we imagine that a man wished truly, as far as possible, to see everything as it was, he would certainly proceed on a different principle. He would seek to divest himself for a time of those personal peculiarities which tend to divide him from the thing he studies. It is as difficult, for example, for a man to examine a fish without developing a certain vanity in possess-

ing a pair of legs, as if they were the latest article of personal adornment. But if a fish is to be approximately understood, this physiological dandyism must be overcome. The earnest student of fish morality will, spiritually speaking, chop off his legs. And similarly the student of birds will eliminate his arms; the frog-lover will with one stroke of the imagination remove all his teeth, and the spirit wishing to enter into all the hopes and fears of jelly-fish will simplify his personal appearance to a really alarming extent. It would appear, therefore, that this great body of ours and all its natural instincts, of which we are proud, and justly proud, is rather an encumbrance at the moment when we attempt to appreciate things as they should be appreciated. We do actually go through a process of mental asceticism, a castration of the entire being, when we wish to feel the abounding good in all things. It is good for us at certain times that our-

selves should be like a mere window—as clear, as luminous, and as invisible.

In a very entertaining work, over which we have roared in childhood, it is stated that a point has no parts and no magnitude. Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are—of immeasurable stature. That the trees are high and the grasses short is a mere accident of our own foot-rules and our own stature. But to the spirit which has stripped off for a moment its own idle temporal standards the grass is an everlasting forest, with dragons for denizens; the stones of the road are as incredible mountains piled one upon the other; the dandelions are like gigantic bonfires illuminating the lands around; and the heath-bells on their stalks are like planets hung in heaven each higher than the other. Re-

tween one stake of a paling and another there are new and terrible landscapes; here a desert, with nothing but one misshapen rock; here a miraculous forest, of which all the trees flower above the head with the hues of sunset; here, again, a sea full of monsters that Dante would not have dared to dream. These are the visions of him who, like the child in the fairy-tales, is not afraid to become small. Meanwhile, the sage whose faith is in magnitude and ambition is, like a giant, becoming larger and larger, which only means that the stars are becoming smaller and smaller. World after world falls from him into insignificance; the whole passionate and intricate life of common things becomes as lost to him as is the life of the infusoria to a man without a microscope. He rises always through desolate eternities. He may find new systems, and forget them; he may discover fresh universes, and learn to despise them. But the

towering and tropical vision of things as they really are—the gigantic daisies, the heaven-consuming dandelions, the great Odyssey of strange-coloured oceans and strange-shaped trees, of dust like the wreck of temples, and thistledown like the ruin of stars—all this colossal vision shall perish with the last of the humble.

A DEFENCE OF PENNY DREADFULS

ONE of the strangest examples of the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued is the example of popular literature, the vast mass of which we contentedly describe as vulgar. The boy's novelette may be ignorant in a literary sense, which is only like saying that a modern novel is ignorant in the chemical sense, or the economic sense, or the astronomical sense; but it is not vulgar intrinsically—it is the actual centre of a million flaming imaginations.

In former centuries the educated class ignored the ruck of vulgar literature. They ignored, and therefore did not, properly speaking, despise it. Simple ignorance and indifference does not inflate the character with pride. A man does not walk down

the street giving a haughty twirl to his moustaches at the thought of his superiority to some variety of deep-sea fishes. The old scholars left the whole underworld of popular compositions in a similar darkness.

To-day, however, we have reversed this principle. We do despise vulgar compositions, and we do not ignore them. We are in some danger of becoming petty in our study of pettiness; there is a terrible Circean law in the background that if the soul stoops too ostentatiously to examine anything it never gets up again. There is no class of vulgar publications about which there is, to my mind, more utterly ridiculous exaggeration and misconception than the current boys' literature of the lowest stratum. This class of composition has presumably always existed, and must exist. It has no more claim to be good literature than the daily conversation of its readers to

be fine oratory, or the lodging-houses and tenements they inhabit to be sublime architecture. But people must have conversation, they must have houses, and they must have stories. The simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part is infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important. Every one of us in childhood has constructed such an invisible *dramatis personæ*, but it never occurred to our nurses to correct the composition by careful comparison with Balzac. In the East the professional story-teller goes from village to village with a small carpet; and I wish sincerely that any one had the moral courage to spread that carpet and sit on it in Ludgate Circus. But it is not probable that all the tales of the carpet-bearer are little gems of original artistic workmanship. Literature and fiction are two entirely different things. Literature is

a luxury; fiction is a necessity. A work of art can hardly be too short, for its climax is its merit. A story can never be too long, for its conclusion is merely to be deplored, like the last halfpenny or the last pipelight. And so, while the increase of the artistic conscience tends in more ambitious works to brevity and impressionism, voluminous industry still marks the producer of the true romantic trash. There was no end to the ballads of Robin Hood; there is no end to the volumes about Dick Deadshot and the Avenging Nine. These two heroes are deliberately conceived as immortal.

But instead of basing all discussion of the problem upon the common-sense recognition of this fact—that the youth of the lower orders always has had and always must have formless and endless romantic reading of some kind, and then going on to make provision for its wholesomeness—we begin, generally speaking, by fantastic

abuse of this reading as a whole and indignant surprise that the errand-boys under discussion do not read "The Egoist," and "The Master Builder." It is the custom, particularly among magistrates, to attribute half the crimes of the Metropolis to cheap novelettes. If some grimy urchin runs away with an apple, the magistrate shrewdly points out that the child's knowledge that apples appease hunger is traceable to some curious literary researches. The boys themselves, when penitent, frequently accuse the novelettes with great bitterness, which is only to be expected from young people possessed of no little native humour. If I had forged a will, and could obtain sympathy by tracing the incident to the influence of Mr. George Moore's novels, I should find the greatest entertainment in the diversion. At any rate, it is firmly fixed in the minds of most people that gutter-boys, unlike everybody else in the

community, find their principal motives for conduct in printed books.

Now it is quite clear that this objection, the objection brought by magistrates, has nothing to do with literary merit. Bad story writing is not a crime. Mr. Hall Caine walks the streets openly, and cannot be put in prison for an anticlimax. The objection rests upon the theory that the tone of the mass of boys' novelettes is criminal and degraded, appealing to low cupidity and low cruelty. This is the magisterial theory, and this is rubbish.

So far as I have seen them, in connection with the dirtiest book-stalls in the poorest districts, the facts are simply these: The whole bewildering mass of vulgar juvenile literature is concerned with adventures, rambling, disconnected and endless. It does not express any passion of any sort, for there is no human character of any sort. It runs eternally in certain grooves of local

and historical type: the medieval knight, the eighteenth-century duellist, and the modern cowboy, recur with the same stiff simplicity as the conventional human figures in an Oriental pattern. I can quite as easily imagine a human being kindling wild appetites by the contemplation of his Turkey carpet as by such dehumanized and naked narrative as this.

Among these stories there are a certain number which deal sympathetically with the adventures of robbers, outlaws and pirates, which present in a dignified and romantic light thieves and murderers like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. That is to say, they do precisely the same thing as Scott's "Ivanhoe," Scott's "Rob Roy," Scott's "Lady of the Lake," Byron's "Corsair," Wordsworth's "Rob Roy's Grave," Stevenson's "Macaire," Mr. Max Pemberton's "Iron Pirate," and a thousand more works distributed systematically as

prizes and Christmas presents. Nobody imagines that an admiration of Locksley in "Ivanhoe" will lead a boy to shoot Japanese arrows at the deer in Richmond Park; no one thinks that the incautious opening of Wordsworth at the poem on Rob Roy will set him up for life as a blackmailer. In the case of our own class, we recognize that this wild life is contemplated with pleasure by the young, not because it is like their own life, but because it is different from it. It might at least cross our minds that, for whatever other reason the errand-boy reads "The Red Revenge," it really is not because he is dripping with the gore of his own friends and relatives.

In this matter, as in all such matters, we lose our bearings entirely by speaking of the "lower classes" when we mean humanity minus ourselves. This trivial romantic literature is not especially plebeian: it is simply human. The philanthropist can

never forget classes and callings. He says, with a modest swagger, "I have invited twenty-five factory hands to tea." If he said, "I have invited twenty-five chartered accountants to tea," every one would see the humour of so simple a classification. But this is what we have done with this lumberland of foolish writing: we have probed, as if it were some monstrous new disease, what is, in fact, nothing but the foolish and valiant heart of man. Ordinary men will always be sentimentalists: for a sentimentalist is simply a man who has feelings and does not trouble to invent a new way of expressing them. These common and current publications have nothing essentially evil about them. They express the sanguine and heroic truisms on which civilization is built; for it is clear that unless civilization is built on truisms, it is not built at all. Clearly, there could be no safety for a society in which the remark by

the Chief Justice that murder was wrong was regarded as an original and dazzling epigram.

If the authors and publishers of "Dick Deadshot," and such remarkable works were suddenly to make a raid upon the educated class, were to take down the names of every man, however distinguished, who was caught at a University Extension Lecture, were to confiscate all our novels and warn us all to correct our lives, we should be seriously annoyed. Yet they have far more right to do so than we; for they, with all their idiotcy, are normal and we are abnormal. It is the modern literature of the educated, not of the uneducated, which is avowedly and aggressively criminal. Books recommending profligacy and pessimism, at which the high-souled errand-boy would shudder, lie upon all our drawing-room tables. If the dirtiest old owner of the dirtiest old book-stall in Whitechapel

dared to display works really recommending polygamy or suicide, his stock would be seized by the police. These things are our luxuries. And with a hypocrisy so ludicrous as to be almost unparalleled in history, we rate the gutter-boys for their immorality at the very time that we are discussing (with equivocal German Professors) whether morality is valid at all. At the very instant that we curse the Penny Dreadful for encouraging thefts upon property, we canvass the proposition that all property is theft. At the very instant we accuse it (quite unjustly) of lubricity and indecency, we are cheerfully reading philosophies which glory in lubricity and indecency. At the very instant that we charge it with encouraging the young to destroy life, we are placidly discussing whether life is worth preserving.

But it is we who are the morbid exceptions; it is we who are the criminal class. This should be our great comfort. The

vast mass of humanity, with their vast mass of idle books and idle words, have never doubted and never will doubt that courage is splendid, that fidelity is noble, that distressed ladies should be rescued, and vanquished enemies spared. There are a large number of cultivated persons who doubt these maxims of daily life, just as there are a large number of persons who believe they are the Prince of Wales; and I am told that both classes of people are entertaining conversationalists. But the average man or boy writes daily in these great gaudy diaries of his soul, which we call Penny Dreadfuls, a plainer and better gospel than any of those iridescent ethical paradoxes that the fashionable change as often as their bonnets. It may be a very limited aim in morality to shoot a "many-faced and fickle traitor," but at least it is a better aim than to be a many-faced and fickle traitor, which is a simple summary of a good many modern

systems from Mr. d'Annunzio's downwards. So long as the coarse and thin texture of mere current popular romance is not touched by a paltry culture it will never be vitally immoral. It is always on the side of life. The poor—the slaves who really stoop under the burden of life—have often been mad, scatter-brained and cruel, but never hopeless. That is a class privilege, like cigars. Their drivelling literature will always be a "blood and thunder" literature, as simple as the thunder of heaven and the blood of men.

MAETERLINCK

THE selection of "Thoughts from Maeterlinck" is a very creditable and also a very useful compilation. Many modern critics object to the hacking and hewing of a consistent writer which is necessary for this kind of work, but upon more serious consideration, the view is not altogether adequate. Maeterlinck is a very great man; and in the long run this process of mutilation has happened to all great men. It was the mark of a great patriot to be drawn and quartered and his head set on one spike in one city and his left leg on another spike in another city. It was the mark of a saint that even these fragments began to work miracles. So it has been with all the very great men of the world. However careless, however botchy, may

be the version of Maeterlinck or of any one else given in such a selection as this, it is assuredly far less careless and far less botchy than the version, the parody, the wild misrepresentation of Maeterlinck which future ages will hear and distant critics be called upon to consider.

No one can feel any reasonable doubt that we have heard about Christ and Socrates and Buddha and St. Francis a mere chaos of excerpts, a mere book of quotations. But from those fragmentary epigrams we can deduce greatness as clearly as we can deduce Venus from the torso of Venus or Hercules *ex pede Herculem.* If we knew nothing else about the Founder of Christianity, for example, beyond the fact that a religious teacher lived in a remote country, and in the course of His peregrinations and proclamations consistently called Himself "the Son of Man," we should know by that alone that He was

a man of almost immeasurable greatness. If future ages happened to record nothing else about Socrates except that he owned his title to be the wisest of men because he knew that he knew nothing, they would be able to deduce from that the height and energy of his civilization, the glory that was Greece. The credit of such random compilations as that which "E. S. S." and Mr. George Allen have just effected is quite secure. It is the pure, pedantic, literal editions, the complete works of this author or that author which are forgotten. It is such books as this that have revolutionized the destiny of the world. Great things like Christianity or Platonism have never been founded upon consistent editions; all of them have been founded upon scrap-books.

The position of Maeterlinck in modern life is a thing too obvious to be easily determined in words. It is, perhaps, best expressed by saying that it is the great

glorification of the inside of things at the expense of the outside. There is one great evil in modern life for which nobody has found even approximately a tolerable description: I can only invent a word and call it "remotism." It is the tendency to think first of things which, as a matter of fact, lie far away from the actual centre of human experience. Thus people say, "All our knowledge of life begins with the amœba." It is false; our knowledge of life begins with ourselves. Thus they say that the British Empire is glorious, and at the very word Empire they think at once of Australia and New Zealand, and Canada, and Polar bears, and parrots and kangaroos, and it never occurs to any one of them to think of the Surrey Hills. The one real struggle in modern life is the struggle between the man like Maeterlinck, who sees the inside as the truth, and the man like Zola, who sees the outside as the truth. A

hundred cases might be given. We may take, for the sake of argument, the case of what is called falling in love. The sincere realist, the man who believes in a certain finality in physical science, says, "You may, if you like, describe this thing as a divine and sacred and incredible vision; that is your sentimental theory about it. But what it is is an animal and sexual instinct designed for certain natural purposes." The man on the other side, the idealist, replies, with quite equal confidence, that this is the very reverse of the truth. I put it as it has always struck me; he replies, "Not at all. You may, if you like, describe this thing as an animal and sexual instinct, designed for certain natural purposes; that is your philosophical or zoölogical theory about it. What it is, beyond all doubt of any kind, is a divine and sacred and incredible vision." The fact that it is an animal necessity only comes to

the naturalistic philosopher after looking abroad, studying its origins and results, constructing an explanation of its existence, more or less natural and conclusive. The fact that it is a spiritual triumph comes to the first errand boy who happens to feel it. If a lad of seventeen falls in love and is struck dead by a hansom cab an hour afterwards, he has known the thing as it is, a spiritual ecstasy; he has never come to trouble about the thing as it may be, a physical destiny. If any one says that falling in love is an animal thing, the answer is very simple. The only way of testing the matter is to ask those who are experiencing it, and none of those would admit for a moment that it was an animal thing.

Maeterlinck's appearance in Europe means primarily this subjective intensity; by this the materialism is not overthrown: materialism is undermined. He brings, not something which is more poetic than

realism, not something which is more spiritual than realism, not something which is more right than realism, but something which is more real than realism. He discovers the one indestructible thing. This material world on which such vast systems have been superimposed—this may mean anything. It may be a dream, it may be a joke, it may be a trap or temptation, it may be a charade, it may be the beatific vision: the only thing of which we are certain is this human soul. This human soul finds itself alone in a terrible world, afraid of the grass. It has brought forth poetry and religion in order to explain matters; it will bring them forth again. It matters not one atom how often the lulls of materialism and scepticism occur; they are always broken by the reappearance of a fanatic. They have come in our time: they have been broken by Maeterlinck.

ON LYING IN BED

LYING in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. This, however, is not generally a part of the domestic apparatus on the premises. I think myself that the thing might be managed with several pails of Aspinall and a broom. Only if one worked in a really sweeping and masterly way, and laid on the colour in great washes, it might drip down again on one's face in floods of rich and mingled colour like some strange fairy-rain; and that would have its disadvantages. I am afraid it would be necessary to stick to black and white in this form of artistic composition. To that purpose, indeed, the white ceiling would be of the greatest possible use; in fact it is the only use I think of a white ceiling being put to.

But for the beautiful experiment of lying in bed I might never have discovered it. For years I have been looking for some blank spaces in a modern house to draw on. Paper is much too small for any really allegorical design; as Cyrano de Bergerac says: "Il me faut des géants." But when I tried to find these fine clear spaces in the modern rooms such as we all live in I was continually disappointed. I found an endless pattern and complication of small objects hung like a curtain of fine links between me and my desire. I examined the walls; I found them to my surprise to be already covered with wall-paper, and I found the wall-paper to be already covered with very uninteresting images, all bearing a ridiculous resemblance to each other. I could not understand why one arbitrary symbol (a symbol apparently entirely devoid of any religious or philosophical significance) should thus be sprinkled all over

my nice walls like a sort of smallpox. The Bible must be referring to wall-papers, I think, when it says, "Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do." I found the Turkey carpet a mass of unmeaning colours, rather like the Turkish Empire, or like the sweetmeat called Turkish delight. I do not exactly know what Turkish delight really is; but I suppose it is Macedonian Massacres. Everywhere that I went forlornly, with my pencil or my paint brush, I found that others had unaccountably been before me, spoiling the walls, the curtains, and the furniture with their childish and barbaric designs.

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Nowhere did I find a really clear place for sketching until this occasion when I prolonged beyond the proper limit the process of lying on my back in bed. Then the light of that white heaven broke upon my vision, that breadth of mere white which

is indeed almost the definition of Paradise, since it means purity and also means freedom. But alas! like all heavens, now that it is seen it is found to be unattainable; it looks more austere and more distant than the blue sky outside the window. For my proposal to paint on it with the bristly end of a broom has been discouraged—never mind by whom; by a person debarred from all political rights—and even my minor proposal to put the other end of the broom into the kitchen fire and turn it into charcoal has not been conceded. Yet I am certain that it was from persons in my position that all the original inspiration came for covering the ceilings of palaces and cathedrals with a riot of fallen angels or victorious gods. I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realized how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made

into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.

The tone now commonly taken towards the practice of lying in bed is hypocritical and unhealthy. Of all the marks of modernity that seem to mean a kind of decadence, there is none more menacing and dangerous than the exultation of very small and secondary matters of conduct at the expense of very great and primary ones, at the expense of eternal public and tragic human morality. If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals it is the modern strengthening of minor morals. Thus it is considered more withering to accuse a man of bad taste than of bad ethics. Cleanliness is not next to godliness nowadays, for cleanliness is made an essential and godliness is regarded as an offence. A playwright can attack the institution of marriage so long as he does not misrepresent the manners of society, and I

have met Ibsenite pessimists who thought it wrong to take beer but right to take prussic acid. Especially this is so in matters of hygiene; notably such matters as lying in bed. Instead of being regarded, as it ought to be, as a matter of personal convenience and adjustment, it has come to be regarded by many as if it were a part of essential morals to get up early in the morning. It is upon the whole part of practical wisdom; but there is nothing good about it or bad about its opposite.

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Misers get up early in the morning; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before. It is the great peril of our society that all its mechanism may grow more fixed while its spirit grows more fickle. A man's minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible, creative; the things that should be unchangeable are his principles, his ideals. But with us the reverse is true;

our views change constantly; but our lunch does not change. Now, I should like men to have strong and rooted conceptions, but as for their lunch, let them have it sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in the top of a tree. Let them argue from the same first principles, but let them do it in a bed, or a boat, or a balloon. This alarming growth of good habits really means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can misuse, it means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure, sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour. If ever that abrupt appeal is made to us we may fail. A man can get used to getting up at five o'clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burned for his opinions; the first experiment is commonly fatal. Let us pay a little more attention to these possibilities

of the heroic and the unexpected. I dare say that when I get out of this bed I shall do some deed of an almost terrible virtue.

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution to be added. Even for those who can do their work in bed (like journalists), still more for those whose work cannot be done in bed (as, for example, the professional harpooner of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this: if you do lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may get up a hypochondriac.

THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

ON my last morning on the Flemish coast, when I knew that in a few hours I should be in England, my eye fell upon one of the details of Gothic carving of which Flanders is full. I do not know whether the thing was old, though it was certainly knocked about and indecipherable, but at least it was certainly in the style and tradition of the early Middle Ages. It seemed to represent men bending themselves (not to say twisting themselves) to certain primary employments. Some seemed to be sailors tugging at ropes; others, I think, were reaping; others were energetically pouring something into something else. This is entirely characteristic of the pictures and carvings

of the early thirteenth century, perhaps the most purely vigorous time in all history. The great Greeks preferred to carve their gods and heroes doing nothing. Splendid and philosophic as their composure is there is always about it something that marks the master of many slaves. But if there was one thing the early mediævals liked it was representing people doing something—hunting or hawking, or rowing boats, or treading grapes, or making shoes, or cooking something in a pot. "Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira voluptas." (I quote from memory.) The Middle Ages is full of that spirit in all its monuments and manuscripts. Chaucer retains it in his jolly insistence on everybody's type of trade and toil. It was the earliest and youngest resurrection of Europe, the time when social order was strengthening, but had not yet become oppressive; the time when religious faiths were strong, but had not yet

been exasperated. For this reason the whole effect of Greek and Gothic carving is different. The figures in the Elgin marbles, though often reining their steeds for an instant in the air, seem frozen forever at that perfect instant. But a mass of mediæval carving seems actually a sort of bustle or hubbub in stone. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that the groups actually move and mix, and the whole front of a great cathedral has the hum of a huge hive.

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But about these particular figures there was a peculiarity of which I could not be sure. Those of them that had any heads had very curious heads, and it seemed to me that they had their mouths open. Whether or no this really meant anything or was an accident of nascent art I do not know; but in the course of wondering I recalled to my mind the fact that singing was connected with many of the tasks

there suggested, that there were songs for reapers reaping and songs for sailors hauling ropes. I was still thinking about this small problem when I walked along the pier at Ostend; and I heard some sailors uttering a measured shout as they laboured, and I remembered that sailors still sing in chorus while they work, and even sing different songs according to what part of their work they are doing. And a little while afterwards, when my sea journey was over, the sight of men working in the English fields reminded me again that there are still songs for harvest and for many agricultural routines. And I suddenly wondered why if this were so it should be quite unknown for any modern trade to have a ritual poetry. How did people come to chant rude poems while pulling certain ropes or gathering certain fruit, and why did nobody do anything of the kind while producing any of the modern things? Why is a

modern newspaper never printed by people singing in chorus? Why do shopmen seldom, if ever, sing?

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If reapers sing while reaping, why should not auditors sing while auditing and bankers while banking? If there are songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a boat, why are there not songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a bank? As the train from Dover flew through the Kentish gardens, I tried to write a few songs suitable for commercial gentlemen. Thus, the work of bank clerks when casting up columns might begin with a thundering chorus in praise of Simple Addition.

"Up my lads and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o'er.
Hear the Stars of Morning shouting: 'Two and Two are four.'

Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the sophists roar,
Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and Two are four.

"There's a run upon the Bank—
Stand away!
For the Manager's a crank and the Secretary drank, and the Upper Tooting Bank
Turns to bay!
Stand close: there is a run
On the Bank.
Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run, that she fired with every gun
Ere she sank."

* * * * *

And as I came into the cloud of London I met a friend of mine who actually is in a bank, and submitted these suggestions in rhyme to him for use among his colleagues. But he was not very hopeful about the matter. It was not (he assured me) that he underrated the verses, or in any sense lamented their lack of polish. No; it was rather, he felt, an indefinable something in

the very atmosphere of the society in which we live that makes it spiritually difficult to sing in banks. And I think he must be right; though the matter is very mysterious. I may observe here that I think there must be some mistake in the calculations of the Socialists. They put down all our distress, not to a moral tone, but to the chaos of private enterprise. Now, banks are private; but post-offices are Socialistic: therefore I naturally expected that the post-office would fall into the collectivist idea of a chorus. Judge of my surprise when the lady in my local post-office (whom I urged to sing) dismissed the idea with far more coldness than the bank clerk had done. She seemed, indeed, to be in a considerably greater state of depression than he. Should any one suppose that this was the effect of the verses themselves, it is only fair to say that the specimen verse of the Post-Office Hymn ran thus:

"O'er London our letters are shaken like snow,
Our wires o'er the world like the thunderbolts go.
The news that may marry a maiden in Sark,
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park."

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy):
"Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park."

And the more I thought about the matter the more painfully certain it seemed that the most important and typical modern things could not be done with a chorus. One could not, for instance, be a great financier and sing; because the essence of being a great financier is that you keep quiet. You could not even in many modern circles be a public man and sing; because in those circles the essence of being a public man is that you do nearly everything in private. Nobody would imagine a chorus of money-lenders. Every one knows the story of the solicitors' corps of volunteers who, when the Colonel on the battle-field cried, "Charge!" all said simul-

taneously, "Six-and-eightpence." Men can sing while charging in a military, but hardly in a legal sense. And at the end of my reflections I had really got no further than the subconscious feeling of my friend the bank clerk—that there is something spiritually suffocating about our life; not about our laws merely, but about our life. Bank clerks are without songs, not because they are poor, but because they are sad. Sailors are much poorer. As I passed homewards I passed a little tin building of some religious sort, which was shaken with shouting as a trumpet is torn with its own tongue. *They* were singing anyhow; and I had for an instant a fancy I had often had before: that with us the superhuman is the only place where you can find the human. Human nature is hunted, and has fled into sanctuary.

A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

MY relations with the readers of this page have been long and pleasant, but—perhaps for that very reason—I feel that the time has come when I ought to confess the one great crime of my life. It happened a long time ago; but it is not uncommon for a belated burst of remorse to reveal such dark episodes long after they have occurred. It has nothing to do with the orgies of the Anti-Puritan League. That body is so offensively respectable that a newspaper, in describing it the other day, referred to my friend Mr. Edgar Jepson as Canon Edgar Jepson; and it is believed that similar titles are intended for all of us. No; it is not by the conduct of Archbishop Crane, of Dean Chesterton, of the Rev.

James Douglas, of Monsignor Bland, and even of that fine and virile old ecclesiastic, Cardinal Nesbit, that I wish (or rather, am driven by my conscience) to make this declaration. The crime was committed in solitude and without accomplices. Alone I did it. Let me, with the characteristic thirst of penitents to get the worst of the confession over, state it first of all in its most dreadful and indefensible form. There is at the present moment, in a town in Germany (unless he has died of rage on discovering his wrong), a restaurant-keeper to whom I still owe twopence. I last left his open-air restaurant knowing that I owed him twopence. I carried it away under his nose, despite the fact that the nose was a decidedly Jewish one. I have never paid him, and it is highly improbable that I ever shall. How did this villainy come to occur in a life which has been, generally speaking, deficient in the dexterity necessary for

fraud? The story is as follows—and it has a moral, though there may not be room for that.

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It is a fair general rule for those travelling on the Continent that the easiest way of talking in a foreign language is to talk philosophy. The most difficult kind of talking is to talk about common necessities. The reason is obvious. The names of common necessities vary completely with each nation and are generally somewhat odd and quaint. How, for instance, could a Frenchman suppose that a coalbox would be called a "scuttle"? It he has ever seen the word scuttle it has been in the Jingo Press, where the "policy of scuttle" is used whenever we give up something to a small Power like Liberals, instead of giving up everything to a great Power like Imperialists. What Englishman in Ger-

many would be poet enough to guess that the Germans call a glove a "hand-shoe"? Nations name their necessities by nicknames, so to speak. They call their tubs and stools by quaint, elvish, and almost affectionate names, as if they were their own children! But any one can argue about abstract things in a foreign language who has ever got as far Exercise IV. in a primer. For as soon as he can put a sentence together at all he finds that the words used in abstract or philosophical discussions are almost the same in all nations. They are the same, for the simple reason that they all come from the things that were the roots of our common civilization. From Christianity, from the Roman Empire, from the mediæval Church, or the French Revolution. "Nation," "citizen," "religion," "philosophy," "authority," "the Republic," words like these are nearly the same in all the countries in which we travel. Re-

strain, therefore, your exuberant admiration for the young man who can argue with six French atheists when he first lands at Dieppe. Even I can do that. But very likely the same young man does not know the French for a shoe-horn. But to this generalization there are three great exceptions. (1) In the case of countries that are not European at all, and have never had our civic conceptions, or the old Latin scholarship. I do not pretend that the Patagonian phrase for "citizenship" at once leaps to the mind, or that a Dyak's word for "the Republic" has been familiar to me from the nursery. (2) In the case of Germany, where, although the principle does apply to many words such as "nation" and "philosophy," it does not apply so generally, because Germany has had a special and deliberate policy of encouraging the purely German part of its language. (3) In the case where one does not know any of the

language at all, as is generally the case with me.

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Such at least was my situation on the dark day on which I committed my crime. Two of the exceptional conditions which I have mentioned were combined. I was walking about a German town, and I knew no German. I knew, however, two or three of those great and solemn words which hold our European civilization together—one of which is "cigar." As it was a hot and dreamy day, I sat down at a table in a sort of beer-garden, and ordered a cigar and a pot of lager. I drank the lager, and paid for it. I smoked the cigar, forgot to pay for it, and walked away, gazing rapturously at the royal outline of the Taunus mountains. After about ten minutes, I suddenly remembered that I had not paid for the cigar. I went back to the place of refreshment, and put down the money.

But the proprietor also had forgotten the cigar, and he merely said guttural things in a tone of query, asking me, I suppose, what I wanted. I said "cigar," and he gave me a cigar. I endeavoured while putting down the money to wave away the cigar with gestures of refusal. He thought that my rejection was of the nature of a condemnation of that particular cigar, and brought me another. I whirled my arms like a windmill, seeking to convey by the sweeping universality of my gesture that my rejection was a rejection of cigars in general, not of that particular article. He mistook this for the ordinary impatience of common men, and rushed forward, his hands filled with miscellaneous cigars, pressing them upon me. In desperation I tried other kinds of pantomime, but the more cigars I refused the more and more rare and precious cigars were brought out of the deeps and recesses of the establish-

ment. I tried in vain to think of a way of conveying to him the fact that I had already had the cigar. I imitated the action of a citizen smoking, knocking off and throwing away a cigar. The watchful proprietor only thought I was rehearsing (as in an ecstasy of anticipation) the joys of the cigar he was going to give me. At last I retired baffled: he would not take the money and leave the cigars alone. So that this restaurant-keeper (in whose face a love of money shone like the sun at noonday) flatly and firmly refused to receive the twopence that I certainly owed him; and I took that twopence of his away with me and rioted on it for months. I hope that on the last day the angels will break the truth very gently to that unhappy man.

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This is the true and exact account of the Great Cigar Fraud, and the moral of it is this—that civilization is founded upon ab-

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stractions. The idea of debt is one which cannot be conveyed by physical motions at all, because it is an abstract idea. And civilization obviously would be nothing without debt. So when hard-headed fellows who study scientific sociology (which does not exist) come and tell you that civilization is material or indifferent to the abstract, just ask yourselves how many of the things that make up our Society, the Law, or the Stocks and Shares, or the National Debt, you would be able to convey with your face and your ten fingers by grinning and gesticulating to a German innkeeper.

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